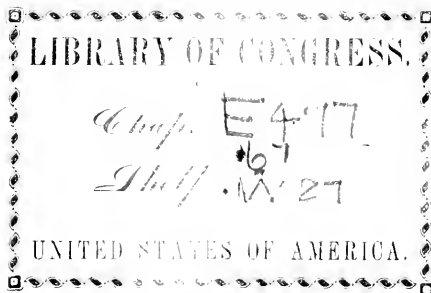


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AN ACCOUNT OF THE OPERATIONS  
OF THE  
FIFTH ARMY CORPS,

COMMANDED BY MAJ.-GEN. G. K. WARREN,

AT THE  
BATTLE OF FIVE FORKS,

APRIL 1, 1865,

AND THE  
BATTLES AND MOVEMENTS PRELIMINARY TO IT.

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BY  
G. K. WARREN,

LATE MAJOR-GENERAL VOLUNTEERS.

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NEW YORK:  
D. VAN NOSTRAND,  
192 BROADWAY.  
1866.



## INTRODUCTION.

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The confidence shown by the Commander-in-Chief in selecting me for the command of the Department of Mississippi, then the theater of actual warfare, immediately after the battle of Five Forks, I deemed a thorough vindication of my conduct on that memorable occasion.

I felt, though denied the official investigation which I had applied for, that I could leave my justification before the public to the ultimate publication of the official reports. I trusted, too, that Gen. Sheridan's report would do me justice, and that he could not fail in it to acknowledge that his treatment of me was hasty and based on erroneous impressions. The publication of this report, dated May 16, in the Official Gazette, disappointed this hope, for therein, as far as mention is made of me, it is in terms of disparagement and in efforts to justify his inconsiderate action.

After this publication I thought the investigation I sought could not long be denied, and I have remained silent till now, fully believing an impartial investigation would relieve me of the imputations of Gen. Sheridan, and place just censure on those by whom I have been wronged.

To bring my professional grievances before the public is a thing from which I have shrunk, and I do not do so now from any love of controversy. If circumstances were different I should be glad to avoid it; but the facts being little known and understood, and there being many misrepresentations, I am under this necessity. I have, therefore, prepared the following narrative of facts in much detail, so that each one can examine and judge for himself, as, I presume, all fair-minded men, whose time will permit, will gladly do.

In the report\* of Gen. Sheridan there are three imputations

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\* Extracts from this report, giving all that relates to me, are placed in the appendix to this narrative.

against me—the *first* of which, is vaguely made, in the following:

“Had Gen. Warren moved according to the expectations of the Lieutenant-General, there would appear to have been but little chance for the escape of the enemy’s infantry in front of Dinwiddie C. H.”

If such expectations were formed, they were not reasonable, according to the facts. I acted during the night under orders from Gen. Meade, which, with my dispatches to him, and other facts, will be given. It will appear that the enemy held all the roads necessary for his escape; that he withdrew from Gen. Sheridan’s front to Five Forks early in the night; and that the swollen state of Gravelly Run and a broken bridge prevented my troops from reaching Gen. Sheridan till day-break. It also will appear that the tenor of my orders from Gen. Meade were not that I was to prevent the escape of the enemy, but to use every exertion to succor Gen. Sheridan, who could “*not maintain himself at Dinwiddie C. H. without reinforcements.*” My dispatches show that it was my own suggestion to attempt to intercept the enemy if he remained in Gen. Sheridan’s front, and not fall back, as I was at first ordered.

The *second* imputation is contained in the following:

“Gen. Warren did not exert himself to get up his Corps as rapidly as he might have done, and his manner gave me the impression that he wished the sun to go down before dispositions for the attack could be completed.”

The facts of the movements of the troops in coming up to this point are all given in the statements of Brevet Brig.-Gen. Bankhead, who carried my order to the troops to move up while I rode forward to examine the ground on which they were to form; and in the letters of Generals Crawford, Griffin, and Ayres, who commanded my three divisions. I present them here in their proper place in the narrative, and they are conclusive that I and my troops exerted ourselves to form for the attack as rapidly as possible.



While the troops were forming I told Gen. Sheridan it would occupy till 4 p. m., at which time they *were* formed, and at which time the sun was *two and a half hours high*. Certainly I could not have expected the sun to go down before the "dispositions for the attack could be completed," nor have given him reason to think I wished it. I had at the time confidence in the success of our proposed attack, and the kindest feelings toward Gen. Sheridan, under whom I was glad to serve. I am utterly at a loss to account for the misapprehension he labored under in imputing such baseness to me, and I trust my conduct throughout the war has shown to those by whom I am best known that I am incapable of it.

The *third* imputation is contained in the following:

"During this engagement portions of his line gave way "when not exposed to a heavy fire, and simply from want of "confidence on the part of the troops, which Gen. Warren did "not exert himself to inspire."

I had, at the time of the engagement, to control the movements of an entire *corps d'armée*, fighting and changing front as it advanced through the forests. It is clearly a case for the exercise of a corps commander's judgment, how far he shall at any time give his personal efforts to the general control of his corps, or assist his subordinate commanders in their commands, and whether he shall use his staff and himself to rally troops who break under a not very severe fire, from want of confidence, or to so direct other portions of his command as to thereby remedy the evil which this giving way produced. Whatever is vital to the success of the whole is the thing deserving the corps commander's attention, and to that, throughout, I gave mine. On account of the forest Gen. Sheridan saw but one flank of the operations of my command, and was no further cognizant of my exertions. He saw nothing of the fighting of Gen. Crawford's division, which suffered more from the enemy's fire than any other. There was no part of my command that did not witness my exertions at one time or another, and my horse was fatally shot close to the enemy's breastworks. To those who served under me I refer for proof of my exertions, and, as they represent every section of our

country, any one who wishes can verify my assertion by those around him.

If Gen. Sheridan had stated which of my troops misbehaved for want of my presence, I could bring the evidence of their commander to bear in my defense. But how this exertion could have been specially required of me I am at loss to understand; for he says himself, "I cannot speak too highly of the troops in this battle and the gallantry of their commanders."

The duty of every soldier to obey has its correlative which entitles him to the protection of those under whom he serves, and this I have been denied.

Gen. Sheridan says :

"I therefore relieved him from the command of the Fifth Corps, authority for this action having been sent to me before the battle, unsolicited."

From the time that authority reached him he, apparently, sought occasion to use it. I say this with regret; but the tone of the report toward me, and his hasty action, indicate that it was so. If a victory won by my command, under my direction, could not gain me credit, where the plans made were, as he says, "*successfully executed*," and where my efforts and directions were known to almost every one, then nothing could.

Gen. Grant, while giving the above authority to Gen. Sheridan, had never signified to me, in the remotest manner, any dissatisfaction with me. I had had no direct official relations with him. My instructions all came through Gen. Meade, and to him all my reports were made. If Gen. Grant had ever expressed himself displeased with me to Gen. Meade, the latter had kept it from me; and he ever showed, by entrusting to me the advance of the army on many vital occasions, and often by sending me on detached expeditions, the highest confidence in me, and this is well known.

I shall further reply to the imputations of Gen. Sheridan while giving the narration of the events to which they relate, which narration, I hope, will possess an interest of its own, independent of its defense of me.

## NARRATIVE.

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In order to introduce the battle of Five Forks intelligently, I will first describe the previous operations of March 29th, 30th, and 31st, and shall do so but briefly, in order to confine attention particularly to the 1st of April and the orders of the night before.

My command, on March 29th, consisted of Gen. Crawford's Division, five thousand two hundred and fifty strong; Gen. Griffin's Division, six thousand one hundred and eighty strong; and Gen. Ayres' Division, three thousand nine hundred and eighty strong. I took with me, as directed, only five four-gun batteries, under Gen. Wainwright. I had no cavalry, except an escort of forty men, under Capt. Horrell.

All the cavalry of the army, except headquarter escorts, was with Gen. Sheridan, whose operations were to be so distinct from mine that I was ordered to act entirely independent of any protection he could give my flanks. My position throughout was on the left flank of the infantry and artillery, army of Gen. Meade.

To facilitate the understanding of the subject, I have added to my narrative a reliable map, on a scale of one mile to an inch. The region represented is of the character common in Virginia, level, much covered with thick and tangled woods, and well watered by numerous small, swampy streams. The soil was clayey or sandy, which, when commingled in wet places, partakes of the nature of "quick-sand," and where, upheaved by the winter frosts that now had left it, presented little less support to wheels or hoofs than would a bank of snow.

I enumerate here the officers of my staff, not merely because it is due to them whenever the operations of the Fifth Army

Corps are considered, but also to point out those to whom any one can specially refer for the correctness of what I write. This staff has probably had as much experience in the actual warfare as any other that could be named. It consisted of Col. H. C. Bankhead, Inspector-General, and Major Wm. T. Gentry, Commissary of Musters, both graduates of the United States Military Academy; of Col. F. T. Locke, Adjutant-General, which position he had held from the organization of the corps, in May, 1862; of Col. A. L. Thomas, Chief Quartermaster; of Col. D. L. Smith, Chief Commissary of Subsistence; of Col. R. C. Spencer, Medical Director; of Dr. Chas. K. Winne, Medical Inspector; and of Capt. Malvern, Chief Ambulance Officer. To these, for the time, was added Capt. Wm. H. H. Benyaurd, of the Regular Engineers, detached from Gen. Meade's staff to accompany me, and who gave me most important assistance, as also did Major Van Bokkelen, of the Volunteer Engineer Brigade, who joined us with a light canvas pontoon train. My personal aides-de-camp were Major E. B. Cope, a most valuable topographical officer; Capt. James S. Wadsworth, son of the lamented Gen. James S. Wadsworth; and Capt. Gordon Winslow, son of the like lamented Rev. Gordon Winslow.

#### BATTLE OF QUAKER ROAD.

We left our camp, in rear of the lines at Petersburg, at three a. m., on March 29th. We moved south, across Rowanty Creek, below the junction of Gravelly and Hatcher's Run, took the road thence to Dinwiddie C. H., as far as the Quaker Road, then turned up this latter, and crossed Gravelly Run.

A sharp engagement took place between a division of the enemy and my advance, consisting of Gen. Griffin's Division, at the Old Saw-Mill site, in which Gen. Griffin drove the enemy back to the junction of the Quaker Road and Boydton Plank-road, inflicting upon him a severe loss, and losing himself three hundred and sixty-seven killed and wounded.

It commenced raining in the night, and continued to do so heavily all day on the 30th. During this day, Gen. Griffin's

line was advanced, with heavy skirmishing up the Boylton Plank-road, so as to confine the enemy, near Burgess' Mill, to his breastworks along the White Oak Road. A reconnoissance by General Ayres' Division was also made, as far west as where the enemy's line along the White Oak Road turned northward to Hatcher's Run, and our picket line established near the White Oak Ridge. Finding on personal examination that, though we could see the road, our pickets did not occupy it, I directed this occupation to be made that evening.

#### BATTLE OF WHITE OAK RIDGE.

Toward daylight on March 31st, Gen. Griffin's Division was relieved by a portion of the Second Army Corps. At 7h. 35m. A. M., in answer to a despatch of Gen. Webb, requesting to be informed of the location of my troops, I sent the following :

"Gen. Griffin's troops will be massed near Mrs. Butler's,  
 " Gen. Ayres near S. Dabney, Gen. Crawford about half-way  
 " between. They are along a wood-road running from near  
 " Mrs. Butler's to W. Dabney's, on the White Oak Road. It  
 " is not practicable now for wheels, and there is a very difficult  
 " branch of Gravelly Run that runs south from the White  
 " Oak Ridge, joining the main stream at the crossing of the  
 " plank-road, which will take a long time to make practicable  
 " for wagons. I have all the pioneers I can spare at work on  
 " it. I will send you a sketch."

It must be noticed here that, at this time, we were quite ignorant of the country I was operating in, and the following corrections are now necessary in the above despatch. The place "S. Dabney's" did not exist, though on our printed maps. The place taken for S. Dabney is marked on the map "unknown." The road, instead of joining the White Oak Road at W. Dabney's, does so near "Butler's." Gen. Griffin's Division was just north of Mrs. Butler's, but this name was given to indicate the approximate location on the map.

The space occupied by the troops extended but little beyond a mile. Gen. Crawford's Division was in juxtaposition

with Gen. Ayres, and massed ready to fight in any direction. Gen. Ayres was cautioned to be prepared to meet the enemy's attack both from the north and west, and reconnoissances were being made to gain a full knowledge of the country.

At 8h. 40m. a. m., I received the following dispatch from Gen. Webb:

"There is firing along Gen. Humphreys' front. The Major-General commanding desires you to be ready to send your reserve, if it should be called for to support Gen. Humphreys. *There will be no movement of troops to-day.*"

To this I at once sent the following reply:

"Your dispatch of 8h. 25m. a. m., is just received. There is a good deal of musketry firing going on in our lines, by the men firing off their guns to put in fresh loads. Unless I break loose entirely from Gen. Humphreys, I think the force he sent to relieve Gen. Griffin is much more than, under any circumstances, would be needed there. My troops are, however, at all times as ready to move as it is possible to keep them for a long time. If the enemy break Gen. Humphreys' line at any time, or threaten to do so, I shall not wait for orders to assist him, if I can."

At 8h. 50m. a. m., I received the following from Gen. Humphreys:

"Please let me know where your right will rest, that I may connect with you. Gen. Miles has relieved Gen. Griffin, and I find a vacant space on his left."

To this I at once replied as follows:

"I send you a sketch of the country west of the plank-road, and a copy of my communication to Gen. Webb, as to my position. I cannot take up any regular line of battle on account of the woods and swamps, but have assembled each division at a point, so they can fight in any direction. I had a brigade of Gen. Griffin's and a battery stationed at Stroud's, for support. I don't think your left could be turned (even if I moved away) without having full information. But as

" my troops now are, I could move Griffin right up on your flank along with my artillery. I shall work hard all day to get the road through the woods in order."

At 8h. 55m. a. m., I received the following from Gen. Webb:

" Owing to the weather, no change will to-day be made in the present position of the troops. Three days' rations of subsistence and forage will be brought up and issued to the troops, and the artillery and wagons authorized to accompany them. The empty supply wagons will be sent to the rear, to be refilled at the railroad terminus. The Chief Engineer and Corps Commanders will use every exertion to make practicable the roads to the rear and communications with their several commands."

At 9.40 a. m. I sent the following dispatch to Gen. Webb:

" I have just received a report from Gen. Ayres that the enemy have their pickets still this side of the White Oak Road, so that their communication is continuous along it. I have sent out word to him to try and drive them off, or develop with what force the road is held by them." This operation I deemed essentially necessary to the security of our own position, and I directed Gen. Ayres to use a brigade, if necessary, the distance being but a few hundred yards. In answer to it I received the following dispatch from Gen. Webb, written 10.30 a. m.:

" Your dispatch, giving Gen. Ayres' position, is received: Gen. Meade directs that should you determine, by your reconnaissance, that you can get possession of the White Oak Road, you are to do so, notwithstanding the orders to suspend operations." \*

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\* Comparison of the preceding dispatches with the following extract relating to the same subject, taken from Lieutenant General Grant's report to the Secretary of War, dated July 22, 1865, published with the annual documents, shows that Lieut. Gen. Grant must have been misinformed in relation to the reports made by me and the orders I received.

[EXTRACT.]

" On the morning of the 31st, Gen. Warren reported favorably to getting

Gen. Winthrop, with his brigade of Gen. Ayres' division, advanced accordingly about half-past 10 a. m., and was repulsed, and simultaneously an attack, which had been preparing against Gen. Ayres, was made by the enemy in heavy force, both from the north and west, and Gen. Ayres' division was forced back. Gen. Ayres did all that was in his power to stay the enemy. I hastened toward the point of attack, but on arriving near Gen. Crawford's division, it was also falling back, and all our efforts to hold the men in the woods were unavailing. Gen. Griffin's line was then formed along the east bank of the branch of Gravelly Run, with Mink's battery on his right, and after some severe fighting the enemy was stopped. Gen's Crawford and Ayres reformed their troops behind this line. Information of these events was sent to Gen. Humphreys early in their occurrence, and he sent Gen. Miles' division to close the space between his left and Gen. Griffin's right. One brigade of this, also, advanced to the attack of the enemy, but was at first driven back.

At 1 p. m. I made the following report to Gen. Webb:

"Gen. Ayres made an advance with a small force at 10 a. m., which the enemy drove back and followed up in heavy force, compelling both Ayres and Crawford to fall back on Griffin, and, of course, in much confusion. Griffin's troops held the enemy at the Run west of the Plank-road. Gen. Miles' division" (a brigade of it) "afterward attacked the enemy and were forced back on my right. My skirmish line in front of Griffin (most of it) has advanced on my left.

"I am going to send forward a brigade, supported by all I can get of Crawford and Ayres, and attack, swinging on our right. Arrangements are being made for this, and it will

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"possession of the White Oak Road, and was directed to do so. To accomplish this, he moved with one division instead of his whole corps."

It is seen that the operations proposed by me and ordered, were as Gen. Meade describes, of the nature of a "reconnaissance" only, the result of which was to determine what should be done. Special arrangement would have to be made with Gen. Humphreys if Griffin's division had to be moved up to the point where Generals Ayres and Crawford were. The action of the enemy, however, interfered with the plans, as they often did, and produced the resulting operations.



"take place about 1.45 p. m., if the enemy does not attack sooner."

Owing to some difficulties in crossing the Run, this advance, which was thus made with the whole available corps, took place a little after the time specified above. Gen. Humphrey's division, under Gen. Miles, also advanced against the enemy about the same period on our right, but the movement was not made in close connection with mine. It is my intention to enter more into details when I receive the official reports of my division commanders.

At 3.40 p. m. I wrote, from the White Oak Road, the following dispatch to Gen. Webb:

"We have driven the enemy, I think, into his breastworks. The prisoners report Gen. Lee here to-day, and also that their breastworks are filled with troops. We have prisoners from a portion of Pickett's and Johnson's divisions.

"Gen. Chamberlain's brigade acted with much gallantry in their advance, capturing nearly the entire Fifty-sixth Virginia Regiment, with its flags."

We met with but little opposition in this advance, so that only this one brigade was earnestly engaged.

The loss to the corps, in killed and wounded, from the morning of March 29th to the close of the battle of White Oak Ridge, was eighteen hundred, and included several distinguished soldiers.

#### OPERATIONS TO SUCCOR GEN. SHERIDAN.

Thus far my operations were independent of those of Gen. Sheridan, but at this point they came into direct relation to him, and the narrative will be given in more detail. It must be borne in mind, however, that I acted under Gen. Meade's orders till daybreak or the morning of April 1.

About 5 p. m., March 31, while on the White Oak Road, I received the following from Gen. Webb, chief of staff:

"Secure your position, and protect, as well as possible, your left flank. Word has been sent to Sheridan, and it is believed that Sheridan is pushing up. Gen. Humphreys will be ordered to push up and to connect with your right.

“You might, if you think it worth while, push a small force down the White Oak Road, and try to communicate with Sheridan, but they must take care not to fire into his advance.”

The rattle of musketry could now be heard southwest from us, which seemed to us to be receding, and which led us to think the enemy was driving our cavalry. I then ordered Gen. Griffin to send Gen. Bartlett, with his brigade, directly across the country, so as to attack the enemy on the flank, and I sent Major Cope, of my staff, with him. At 5.15 p. m. I received the following from Gen. Webb, which directed what before had only been suggested:

“The Major-General commanding directs that you push a brigade down the White Oak Road to open it for Gen. Sheridan, and support the same if necessary. The firing is so near that the General presumes that the command will not have far to go. The distance you will push out must depend on the circumstances of the movement and the support you can give them.”

Thus, at the time when to Gen. Meade it seemed “the firing is so near,” it plainly sounded to us more and more distant, indicating that our cavalry was falling back, of which I soon had confirmation.

At 5.50 p. m. I sent the following to Gen. Webb:

“I have just seen an officer and a sergeant from Gen. Sheridan’s command, who were cut off in an attack by the enemy and escaped. From what they say, our cavalry was attacked about noon by cavalry and infantry, and rapidly driven back, two divisions—Crook’s and Devin’s—being engaged. The firing seemed to recede from me toward Dinwiddie C. H. I have sent Gen. Bartlett and my escort in that direction, but I think they cannot be in time. I hear cannonading that I think is from near Dinwiddie C. H.”

About 6.30 p. m. I received the following from Gen. Webb:

“A staff officer of Gen. Merritt’s has made a report that the enemy has penetrated between Sheridan’s main command and your position—this is a portion of Pickett’s division. Let the force ordered to move out the White Oak Road move down the Boydton Plank Road as promptly as possible.”

The force I had sent under Gen. Bartlett had now been gone an hour, and to recall it would have required two hours at least for it to reach the Boydton Plank Road, and make it too late for use before dark. My artillery had all been left on the Boydton Plank-road on account of the mud, which had compelled me to do so, and Gen. Griffin had left Brevet Brig.-Gen. Pierson there, with three regiments of infantry, of Brevet Major-Gen. Bartlett's brigade, to support it. I therefore sent the following dispatch to Gen. Webb, at 6.30 p. m., which explained what I did :

"I have ordered Gen. Pierson, with three regiments that  
"are now on the Plank-road, right down toward Dinwiddie  
"C. H. I will let Bartlett work and report result, as it is too  
"late to stop him."

It was then nearly dark.

Having reconnoitered the enemy's breastworks on the White Oak Road, I added the following, concerning them, to my dispatch of 6.30 p. m. :

"We can see the enemy's breastworks for two miles east  
"along the White Oak Road. If they are well manned they  
"cannot be carried. I am within two hundred yards of where  
"they turn off northward from the White Oak Road."

I then gave direction to secure the position we had gained by intrenching, and proceeded, with my staff, back about two miles to the Boydton Plank-road, at which place I could communicate by telegraph with Gen. Meade during the night. Gen. Meade's headquarters were distant four and a half miles, near where the Vaughan Road crosses Hatcher's Run. Gen. Grant's were near Dabney's Mill, about four miles from me, Gen. Sheridan's at Dinwiddie C. H., distant five and a half miles, and separated from me by a stream not fordable for infantry where it crossed the Boydton Plank-road, and the bridge was broken down. Gen. Grant and Gen. Meade were about ten miles from Gen. Sheridan.

At 8 p. m. I received the following dispatch from Gen. Meade, written 7.30 p. m. :

"Dispatch from Gen. Sheridan says he was forced back to  
"Dinwiddie C. H. by strong force of cavalry supported by

“infantry. This leaves your rear and that of the Second Corps  
“on the Boydton Plank-road open, and will require great  
“vigilance on your part. If you have sent the brigade down  
“the Boydton Plank-road, it should not go farther than  
“Gravelly Run, as I don’t think it will render any service but  
“to protect your rear.”

Gen. Pierson had been compelled to stop at Gravelly Run  
on account of the swollen stream and broken bridge.

At 8.20 p. m. I wrote to Gen. Webb:

“I sent Gen. Bartlett out on the road running from the  
“White Oak Road and left him there. He is nearly down to  
“the crossing of Gravelly Run. This will prevent the enemy  
“communicating by that road to-night. I have about two reg-  
“iments and the artillery to hold the Plank-road toward Din-  
“widdie C. H. It seems to me the enemy cannot remain be-  
“tween me and Dinwiddie C. H. if Sheridan keeps fighting  
“them, and I believe they will have to fall back to the Five  
“Forks. If I have to move to-night I shall leave a good many  
“men who have lost their way. Does Gen. Sheridan still hold  
“Dinwiddie C. H.?”

At 8.40 p. m. I received, by telegraph, the following,  
marked confidential, from Gen. Webb:

“The probability is that we will have to contract our lines  
“to-night. You will be required to hold, if possible, the Boyd-  
“ton Plank-road and to Gravelly Run—Humphreys and Ord  
“along the Run. Be prepared to do this at short notice.”

I regretted exceedingly to see this step foreshadowed, for I  
feared it would have the “morale” of giving a failure to our  
whole movement, as similar orders had done on previous occa-  
sions. It would beside relieve the enemy in front of Sheridan  
from the threatening attitude which my position gave me, and  
I therefore sent the following, by telegraph, at 8.40 p. m., to  
Gen. Webb:

“The line along the Plank-road is very strong. One divi-  
“sion, with my artillery, I think, can hold it, if we are not  
“threatened south of Gravelly Run, east of the Plank-road.  
“Gen. Humphreys and my batteries, I think, could hold this  
“securely, *and let me move down and attack the enemy at Din-*

" *widdie C. H. on one side and Sheridan on the other.* On account of Bartlett's position they (the enemy) will have to make a considerable detour to reinforce their troops at that point from the north. Unless Gen. Sheridan has been too badly handled, I think we have a chance for an open field fight that should be made use of."

My object was not effected at once, for at 9.17 p. m. I received the following, by telegraph, written by Gen. Webb at 9 p. m. :

" You will, by direction of the Major-General commanding, draw back at once to your position within the Boydton Plank-road. Send a division down to Dinwiddie C. H., to report to Gen. Sheridan. This division will go down the Boydton Plank-road. Send Griffin's division. Gen. Humphreys will hold to Mrs. Butler's."

Whereupon I issued the following order to my command, which was sent out 9.35 p. m. :

" I. Gen. Ayres will immediately withdraw his division back to where it was massed yesterday, near the Boydton Plank Road.

" II. Gen. Crawford will follow Gen. Ayres, and mass his troops behind the intrenchments near Mrs. Butler's.

" III. Gen. Griffin will immediately withdraw Gen. Bartlett to his present position, then move back to the Plank-road and down it to Dinwiddie C. H., and report to Gen. Sheridan.

" IV. Capt. Horrell, with his escort, will remain where Gen. Griffin's headquarters now are till daybreak, and then come back to the Plank Road, bringing in all stragglers.

" V. Division commanders, in executing this movement, which is ordered by Gen. Meade, will take care to see that none of their pickets or any portion of the troops are left behind.

" VI. Gen. Ayres and Gen. Crawford will have their troops under arms at daybreak, and the chief of artillery will have all the batteries in readiness to move."

At 9.50 p. m. I received, by telegraph, the following from Gen. Webb, written 9.20 p. m. :

"The division to be sent to Sheridan will start at once. You are to be held free to act within the Boydton Plank Road. Gen. Humphreys will hold to the road and the rest turn."

To this I immediately replied:

"Your dispatch of 9.20 is just received. I had already sent out my orders, of which I send you a copy. You directed Gen. Griffin to be sent to Gen. Sheridan at once. It will take so much time to get his command together that I withdrew the other divisions first, they being unengaged; but this will not retard Gen. Griffin. The bridge is broken on the Plank-road, and will take I hardly know how long to make practicable for infantry. I sent an officer (Capt. Ben-yaurd, Engin'r) to examine it as soon as your first order was received. He now reports it not passable for infantry. It requires a span of forty feet to complete the bridge, and the stream is too deep to ford. Nevertheless, I will use everything I can get to make it passable by the time Gen. Griffin's division reaches it."

Gen. Griffin's division, in addition to the delay of assembling Gen. Bartlett's brigade, had to withdraw a picket line in front of the enemy, and, if it moved first, the others, pending it, had to relieve this picket line.

The bridge over Gravelly Run we had found broken by the enemy on our occupation of the Plank-road on the 29th. As I was required to operate independent of the cavalry, and protect my own flanks, it was desirable to me (being in my rear, as I faced the enemy on the White Oak Road), that it should remain so. Even the dispatch of this evening from Gen. Meade, which I received at 8 p. m. (previously given), would have justified me in destroying it had it yet been standing intact. I had no pontoons with me now; the supply with which I started on the 29th had been used in bridging Rowanty Creek and the Quaker Road crossing of Gravelly Run, and the boats and engineers were kept there for the service of the trains.

At 9.15 p. m. I received, by telegraph, the following dispatch from Gen. Webb, written 10.40 p. m.:

"Since your dispatch of 8.20 p. m., the General commanding finds that it is impossible for Bartlett to join Griffin in time to move with any promptitude down the Boydton Plank-road. He therefore directs that you send another good brigade to join Griffin, in the place of Bartlett's, in this movement. Sheridan was attacked by five brigades from Gordon's corps—three from Pickett's; possibly by two from Gordon's, one of them being Hoke's old brigade."

This dispatch showed that my previous one, giving the condition of the bridge at Gravelly Run, had not yet been received. I deemed it would show, when it was, that Gen. Bartlett could join Gen. Griffin before the bridge would be passable, and that Griffin could thus reach Sheridan as soon as any one, and require no change in my previous order; and, while waiting the result of the reception of the knowledge of the state of the crossing by Gen. Meade, I at 10.50 p. m. received the following dispatch from him, written 10.15 p. m.:

"Send Griffin promptly as ordered, by the Boydton Plank Road, and move the balance of your command by the road Bartlett is on, and strike the enemy's rear, who is between him and Dinwiddie C. H. Gen. Sheridan reports his position as north of Dinwiddie C. H., near Dr. Smith's, the enemy holding the cross-roads at that point. Should the enemy turn on you, your line of retreat will be by J. M. Brooks' and R. Boiscan's, on the Boydton Plank-road. (See one-inch map.) You must be very prompt in this movement, and get the forks of the road at J. M. Brooks' before the enemy, so as to open to R. Boiscan's. The enemy will probably retire toward Five Forks, that being the direction of their main attack this day. Don't encumber yourself with anything that will impede your progress or prevent your moving in any direction. Let me know when Griffin starts and when you start."

This dispatch also showed that mine, concerning the crossing of Gravelly Run, was still not received. That I did not over-estimate the effect of this dispatch, when it should reach, is proved by Gen. Meade's dispatch written at 11.45 p. m. (See p. 24.) It also showed complete ignorance of the position of

the enemy along "the road Bartlett is (was) on," for the enemy already held this road on the south side of Gravelly Run, and, if not themselves at J. M. Brooks', occupied our approach to it. The condition of affairs here is given by Major Cope, in his report, as follows:

"About 5 p. m. you directed me to lead Bartlett's brigade "by a direct road, if possible, toward the sound of firing in "the direction of Dinwiddie C. H., and attack the enemy in "the rear. I immediately reported to Gen. Bartlett, who had "his column put in motion. The left of the corps rested in "open ground. We came out from the left and crossed this "ground for half a mile; then we came to a small branch of "Gravelly Run on the edge of the timber. Here we found a "wood-road that ran in the right direction. We followed it "one mile through the wood over rolling ground, crossing the "branches of Gravelly Run. At the south edge of this timber, and in open ground on a hill, stands Dr. ——'s house "and here our skirmishers became engaged with the enemy's "pickets. The ground slopes from here to Gravelly Run, and "is open all the way down. The enemy, after considerable "skirmishing, were driven down the slope and across the Run "three-quarters of a mile from the house. The house is near "a main road leading north from Dinwiddie C. H. to the "main road. Gen. Bartlett established a line of pickets along "Gravelly Run crossing this road. He also kept videttes out "on his right watching this road and other approaches in the "rear. It was much after dark when he had made the proper "disposition of his troops, and then we began to turn our attention to the number and extent of the enemy's camp fires. "They seemed to stretch for miles on the south side of the "Run, and we could distinctly hear them chopping, moving "wagons and talking."

In addition to this, the enemy held the point on the road Bartlett was on, where it joins the White Oak Road, as had been ascertained by Major Gentry of my staff, while endeavoring to communicate with Gen. Bartlett. The Major lost his orderly by capture, while he narrowly escaped himself.

It was now one hour and a half since my order had been



sent withdrawing the divisions to the Plank-road, so that I supposed they were all moving back toward the Plank-road, along the forest road, with its single bridge across the branch of Gravelly Run, and in the order of Ayres, Crawford, Griffin, with Gen. Bartlett's brigade nearly rejoined to the latter. To prevent the confusion and delay that would occur by bringing Gen. Griffin to the Plank-road and sending back Gen. Ayres, one of which would have to leave the road for the other to pass, and to save the time that would be lost by each division in changing their relative places, I determined to send Gen. Ayres' division to Dinwiddie C. H. instead of Gen. Griffin's, as it greatly simplified and expedited the operation, and saved the men's strength so sorely tried. It had, beside, the effect to prevent the separation of brigades from their proper divisions, and keep each intact—a matter of importance. As quickly as I could write it, I at 11 p. m. issued the following order :

“ 1st. Gen. Ayres, instead of halting his command, as “ directed in his last order (see mine on p. 17), will proceed “ down the plank-road to Dinwiddie C. H., and report to “ Gen. Sheridan. He will send a staff officer to report here “ when the head of the column arrives.

“ 2d. Gen. Crawford and Gen. Griffin will mass their “ divisions at the point where the order reaches them, and “ report their position by the officer that brings it. A change “ of plan makes this change of order necessary.”

I note here, a little out of the order of time, that I did not learn the position of Gen. Crawford and Gen. Griffin till 1 a. m., and so difficult had it been to get the troops in motion on this intensely dark and stormy night, that, although this order from me was sent one hour and a half after the one for them to fall back to the Plank-road, yet it found them still in the same position. It must be remembered that our troops, so near the enemy, could not be roused by drums and bugles or loud commands, but each order had to be communicated from each commander to his subordinate, from the General till it reached the non-commissioned officers, which latter only could arouse each man by a shaking.

The obstacles to overcome in carrying out so many orders in the darkness of a stormy, starless night, when the moon had set, deserves a statement of them in detail.

The roads and paths the staff officers and messengers would have to take, were often filled with troops, and were as bad as clayey soil at the breaking up of winter could make them. These routes were mostly shut in by the evergreen forests through which they passed, rendering the night's darkness as profound as that of the deepest caverns. The horse, exhausted for want of food and wearied with life-and-death exertions, carried his rider slowly through the mud, and staggered and stumbled over the obstructions. The messenger disappeared on his mission the instant he moved, and once out of call of the voice, could not be stopped or found till he had made the tour his instructions required, and returned to the place of departure. On arriving at his destination, the messenger, though, perhaps, familiar with it in the daylight just closed, could scarce recognize it in the light of the camp-fires, which burned around him on every side, showing everything in disproportioned and unreal forms. By these fires, the exhausted soldiers slept heavily, almost deaf to the questions addressed to ascertain the locality, or answered half in their sleep. The commanding officers, to escape the noise of drivers urging their struggling teams along the muddy roads, and the straggling of men over them as they slept, were compelled, in seeking repose, to establish their headquarters a little away from the main routes; and this alone many times caused vexatious delays in getting orders to them. Added to these were the vicissitudes of battle, which always left the commands and detachments scattered, more or less, as the day closed, and much increased the difficulties of getting the orders for a general movement in the night, sometimes causing such detachments to be left entirely without orders, when all the rest of their commands had moved away.

Knowing all these things, every precaution was used to provide for them, but yet they always existed.

In order to comply with Gen. Meade's first order, I had first to send an officer to each division. Then Major Cope was

the only person capable of taking an order to Gen. Bartlett's Brigade, and he was sent. I had sent Major Gentry to ascertain Gen. Bartlett's location; but he, taking the White Oak Road, found the enemy holding the junction of it with the one Gen. Bartlett was on, and failed, as before stated, to find a way to him. I had to send another officer for the pioneers, and go with them at once to the crossing of Gravelly Run, to make the bridge. I had to send another to the bridge itself, to report the condition of the crossing. I had, with my full complement of staff officers, but the following available, all the others being engaged in their appropriate departments: Col. Bankhead, Major Gentry, Major Cope, Capt. Bényard, Capt. Wadsworth, and Capt. Winslow.

Having, under these circumstances, made my dispositions to execute one order for a general movement promptly, it is easy to see what strait I was placed in to countermand those orders before the officers sent out with the first one returned.

But to resume the narration. After I had sent the order last quoted, I informed Gen. Meade what I had done, as follows:

"I issued my orders, on Gen. Webb's first dispatch, to fall back, which made the divisions retire in the order they could most readily move, viz.: Ayres, Crawford, and Griffin. I cannot change them to-night without producing confusion that will render all my operations nugatory. I will now send Gen. Ayres to Gen. Sheridan, and take Gen. Griffin and Gen. Crawford to move against the enemy, as this last dispatch directs I should. Otherwise, I cannot accomplish the apparent objects of the orders I have received."

I proceeded to make the necessary orders and arrangements to move with the two divisions as soon as I could. The movement had to be made without artillery, or ambulances, or ammunition wagons, and instructions had to be given, in the two latter cases, for special provisions. The Chief of Artillery had to be informed, and relations established between him and Gen. Humphreys, commanding the Second

Corps, whose troops were required to take my place along the Plank-road.

At twenty minutes past twelve, I received the following from Gen. Humphreys:

"I am directed to resume my position of this morning, &c., &c. At what time do you propose to move? I propose to move simultaneously with you."

To this I sent the following reply:

"I have just received your dispatch, by Capt. Wistar. Under the order to withdraw at once," (viz., that received at 9.17 p. m.), "I thought we each could do so individually under cover of darkness, and so ordered. I have since received orders to attack the enemy with two divisions, sending one down the Plank-road to report to Gen. Sheridan. My artillery, five four-gun batteries, under Gen. Wainwright, will remain on the line of the Plank-road. I think the enemy that drove Gen. Sheridan must withdraw to-night. I had a brigade on the road north from J. Boiscan's. I have now orders to move against the force that attacked Sheridan, and shall send all I have to move there, or wherever the firing of battle near us may indicate."

At 1 a. m., I received reports from my officers who had returned from carrying my order of 11 p. m., and learned the position of Gens. Crawford and Griffin. At this time, I received the following dispatch from Gen. Meade, written by him at 11h. 45m. p. m.:

*"A dispatch, partially transmitted, is received, indicating the bridge over Gravelly Run is destroyed, and time will be required to rebuild it. If this is the case, would not time be gained by sending the troops by the Quaker Road? Time is of the utmost importance. Sheridan cannot maintain himself at Dinwiddie without reinforcements, and yours are the only ones that can be sent. Use every exertion to get troops to him as soon as possible. If necessary, send troops by both roads, and give up the rear attack. If Sheridan is*

*"not reinforced, and compelled to fall back, he will retire by the Vaughan Road."*

On receiving this dispatch, showing so much solicitude for Gen. Sheridan's position, and the necessity of reinforcing him directly, even if I had to countermand the previous order, and forego entirely the rear attack, and which, also, left the question for me to determine, I felt much anxiety about what to do. The night was far advanced. The distance to Dinwiddie C. H. by the Quaker Road, from the location of my troops, was over ten miles. It was impossible for them to reach there by that road before 8 a. m. By that time they could be of no use in holding Dinwiddie C. H. In this case, the most direct route for the rear attack would be down the Plank-road, where Gen. Ayres was marching. This attack, too, would be then the most effective, as the whole corps would be together in making it, and all in communication with head-quarters and Gen. Sheridan, which might be of great importance. If Gen. Sheridan retired by the Vaughan Road, too, the rear and right flank of Gen. Humphreys would be left exposed, as stated in Gen. Meade's dispatch, received by me at 8 p. m. (already given here). To send the division around by the Quaker Road was to break my command up in three pieces, and, if it had been done, it is doubtful if the success of the 1st of April would have been gained, as the men thus sent would have been too exhausted to reach the Five Forks that day.

I therefore determined that it was best to abide the movements already begun, and keep the two divisions, Griffin's and Crawford's, where they were, till I could hear that Gen. Ayres certainly had reinforced Gen. Sheridan. The men of the two divisions were gaining, while waiting this result, a little of that rest they stood so much in need of, on this their fourth night of almost continual deprivation of it, and we had but a short distance to move before reaching the enemy, near J. Boiséau's.

Having determined this, at one p. m., I wrote the following dispatch to Gen. Meade:

"I think we will have an infantry bridge over Gravelly

"Run sooner than I could send troops around by the Quaker Road. But if I find any failure, I will send that way. I have sent Capt. Benyaurd (two hours ago) with what he thought was necessary to make it practicable in one hour, and trust to that. I am sending to Gen. Sheridan my most available force."

At 2.5 a. m., I learned the following, which I sent Gen. Webb:

"The bridge over Gravelly Run Capt. Benyaurd reports now practicable for infantry, and Gen. Ayres advancing across it toward Dinwiddie C. H. I have given Gen. Ayres orders to report to Gen. Sheridan."

At 4½ a. m. I received information that Gen. Ayres had communicated with Gen. Sheridan, and, while I was just mounting to join Generals Griffin and Crawford, to move across the country against the enemy at J. Boiseau's, I received the following from Gen. Sheridan, at 4.50 a. m., which is published with his report, and there stated to be written at 3 a. m.

"I am holding in front of Dinwiddie C. H., on the road leading to Five Forks, for three-quarters of a mile, with Gen. Custer's division. The enemy are in his immediate front, lying so as to cover the road just this side of the Adams' House, which leads out across Chamberlain's *bed* or *run*. I understand you have a division at J. Boiseau's; if so, you are in *rear* of the enemy's line and almost on his flank. I will hold on here. Possibly they may attack Custer at daylight; if so, have this division attack instantly and in full force. Attack at daylight any way, and I will make an effort to get the road this side of Adams' House, and if I do, you can capture the whole of them. Any force moving down the road I am holding, or on the White Oak Road, will be in the enemy's rear, and in all probability get any force that may escape you by a flank attack. Do not fear my leaving here. If the enemy remain I shall fight at daylight."

This suppositious state of affairs given above promised most

brilliant results if true, but it was not. The enemy occupied the position at J. Boiseau's on the preceding night, and instead of my having a division there, the nearest to it I had was Bartlett's brigade, about three-quarters of a mile north of Gravelly Run, the crossing of which the enemy guarded. Even this brigade of mine I had to withdraw, by Gen. Meade's order, at 9.35 p. m. I fully expected, if the enemy had not retreated, to have to fight a battle in order to get across Gravelly Run near to J. Boiseau's, and, if the enemy had designed to stay, we undoubtedly must have done so. I so anticipated in my instructions to Gen. Griffin. About 5 a. m. Gen. Griffin left his position near the enemy on the White Oak Road, and moved directly and rapidly across the country to Crumps. He found the enemy had left the crossing of the Run open, and he moved on to J. Boiseau's, meeting at the forks of the road our cavalry, under Gen. Devin. At this point Gen. Griffin reported to Gen. Sheridan, as I had directed, should such a state of affairs as was found be developed.

I remained with Gen. Crawford's division, which we formed to retire in line of battle to meet the enemy, should he pursue us from his breastworks, as I confidently expected he would as soon as he discovered our movements.\* I also deployed my escort to retire toward the Plank-road to take back any men or supplies which might be coming to that point through ignorance of the changes that had been made in the night. Gen. Griffin's march having been unobstructed, I did not reach him till he had met our cavalry. I then ascertained, too, that Gen. Ayres' division was massed about half a mile south of us near J. M. Brooks's.

It will be recollected that Gen. Ayres began to move back from the White Oak Road by an order from me, sent at 9.35 p. m., and which was the first intimation of sending troops

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\* The neglect of the enemy to follow up Gen. Crawford's division as he withdrew is still inexplicable to me, for had they done so, Gen. Lee would have been early informed of the movement of our infantry against his detached force at Five Forks, and either have reinforced them or warned them to withdraw, and the disaster to them which resulted might have not occurred. It seems to me an oversight not to have been expected from our previous experience.

to Gen. Sheridan. No orders stopped him, nor did anything delay him but physical obstacles—such as the darkness, bad roads, and broken bridge. I will now quote from his report the result:

“The division was ordered to move down the Boydton “Pike during the night of March 31, and report to Gen. Sheridan at Dinwiddie C. H. Before arriving there it was met by a staff officer of Gen. Sheridan, with instructions to turn off on a road leading west into a road leading from Dinwiddie C. H. to the White Oak Road” (*i. e.*, from R. Boiseau’s to J. M. Brooks’s), “and come upon the left and rear of the enemy, who was facing Gen. Sheridan’s command near Dinwiddie. As we approached, *just* after *daylight*, the enemy hastily decamped.”

This actual trial disposes of the question of the ability of my troops to reach Gen. Sheridan by midnight. It took Gen. Ayres till daybreak.

It may be said, in support of the expectations, that the state of the bridge and stream were not known when the expectations were formed; but they should have been. The route was used for communications between Gen. Grant and Gen. Sheridan the two preceding days. But even if not known then, they certainly were when Gen. Sheridan wrote his report and Gen. Grant authorized its publication, and it was but manly and just to have then corrected any unfavorable impression his lack of knowledge at the time may have caused him to take up concerning me.

But, let us suppose the two divisions that Gen. Grant directed to be moved by J. Boiseau’s, were expected to reach Gen. Sheridan by midnight. The order which I received was written by Gen. Meade 10.15 p. m., five minutes after Gen. Grant’s to Gen. Sheridan. It reached me 10.50 p. m., thirty-five minutes after being written. Supposing all possible dispatch used, twenty minutes at least would be required for me to make the necessary arrangements; *twenty* more minutes would be required to carry my order to the divisions; *twenty* more minutes for them to transmit them to the brigades; and *forty* minutes, at least, for the troops to get ready to move;



for it must be remembered that no bugles or drums could be used to sound calls or arouse the men. No general could make plans based on greater rapidity of execution than here allowed, and our experience rarely realized it on the most favorable occasions, while this was one of the least so. Summing up these intervals of time we have two hours to add to the time of Gen. Grant writing to Gen. Sheridan. I venture to say it took nearly this time for the note itself to reach Gen. Sheridan. Adding these two hours, would make it at least twelve o'clock before my two divisions could move. They then had four miles to traverse, taking the White Oak Road, before reaching the crossing of Gravelly Run, which would occupy till 2 a. m. They had then to cross the stream and strike the rear of the enemy opposed to Gen. Sheridan, enumerated by him as follows:

"The opposing force was Pickett's division, Wise's independent brigade of infantry, and Fitz Hugh Lee's, Rossers', and W. H. Lee's cavalry commands. This force is too strong for us."

To join Gen. Sheridan by midnight, on this route, I then had to capture or destroy whatever of this force was between me and Gen. Sheridan. Any expectations more unreasonable could not have been formed, nor would I attribute them to any one not wholly ignorant of the true state of the case.

In regard to intercepting the enemy, the facts show it was impossible under the circumstances. I learned from deserters that they had begun to move toward Five Forks as early as 10 p. m. the night before, believing their position would be untenable the next morning. They had consequently withdrawn in the night, carrying off their wounded and leaving only a cavalry picket in Gen. Sheridan's front, which, as Gen. Ayres says, "hastily decamped" as he approached at daylight. It will be seen by a dispatch of Gen. Meade to Gen. Grant, dated 6 a. m. (given hereafter), that Gen. Sheridan must have been aware of this withdrawal of the enemy early in the night.

While awaiting with Gen. Griffin for instructions from Gen. Sheridan, who had advanced with the cavalry toward Five Forks, I received, about 9½ a. m., the following order, written by Gen. Webb at 6 a. m.:

"Gen. Meade directs that, in the movements following your junction with Gen. Sheridan, you will be under his orders, and will report to him. Please send a report of progress."

I sent the report of progress requested, which was in accordance with the facts hereinbefore given.

To show how Gen. Meade was led to send me this order, I will give a copy of a dispatch from him to Gen. Grant, written 6 a. m., April 1, an official copy of which was furnished me:

"The officer sent to Sheridan returned between 2 and 3 a. m., without any written communication, but giving Gen. S.'s opinion that the enemy were retiring from his front. The absence of firing this morning would seem to confirm this. I was asleep at the time this officer returned, and did not get the information till just now. Should this prove true, Warren will be at or near Dinwiddie soon, with his whole corps, and will require further orders."

This dispatch shows an important circumstance also that affects the question of my ability to intercept the enemy. The officer that brought Gen. Meade this information from Gen. Sheridan, between 2 and 3 a. m., could not have left Gen. Sheridan less than two hours previous, the distance being about ten miles over the worst possible roads; so that Gen. Sheridan thought the enemy was retiring as early, at least, as between 12 and 1, and the information could scarce have reached Gen. Sheridan, from his picket line, in less than one hour's time, so that the enemy's movements in retiring must have become apparent as early, at least, as between 11 and 12. This confirms the reports deserters, in the morning, gave me, and which the completeness of the withdrawal sustains. Thus, at the very time of the night that Gen. Sheridan thought the enemy retreating, I was impressed, by repeated dispatches from Gen. Meade, that Gen. S. could not hold on without reinforcements, and I acted under that authority and belief.

The order from Gen. Meade placing me under Gen. Sheridan's orders, however, was not necessary for that purpose, as I should have obeyed any orders Gen. Sheridan might give me, recognizing him as my superior army commander.

## BATTLE OF FIVE FORKS.

When I met Gen. S., at about 11 a. m., his manner was cordial and friendly. I had never served with him before.

After talking with Gen. Sheridan a short time, at the place I found him, while he was occasionally receiving reports from his cavalry, he mounted and rode off to the front. At 1 p. m. an officer brought to me an order to bring up the infantry. I at once dispatched Col. (now Brevet Brig.-Gen.) Bankhead to give the orders to the division commanders to bring up their commands, specifying the order which I thought they could most rapidly move in. I then went up the Five Forks Road in advance of the infantry, to see Gen. Sheridan and to inform myself of the use to be made of my troops, so that no time would be lost on their arrival. Gen. S. explained to me the state of affairs, and what his plan was for me to do. This I entered upon most cordially. Gen. S. had placed an officer back on the road to mark the point where my command was to turn off. I then rode back to the point indicated, turned up the road which led by Gravelly Run Church, and examined the ground, and employed my escort, which had by this time rejoined me, to picket the front I was to take up, so as to prevent the enemy discovering the presence of the infantry.

Gen. Sheridan's order was to form the whole corps before advancing, so that all of it should move simultaneously. He specially stated that the formation was to be oblique to the road, with the right advanced, with two divisions in front and the third in reserve behind the right division. The number of lines and consequent extent of front he left me to decide. Upon examination, I determined on an equivalent of three lines of battle for each of the front divisions, arranged as follows: Each division was to place two brigades in front, each brigade in two lines of battle, and the third brigade in two lines of battle behind the centre of the two front lines. The third division to be posted in column of battalions in mass behind the right. To Gen. Ayres I assigned my left, Gen. Crawford my right, and Gen. Griffin my reserve behind the right. In moving, they were instructed to keep closed to the

left, and to preserve their direction in the woods, by keeping the sun, then shining brightly, in the same position over their left shoulders.

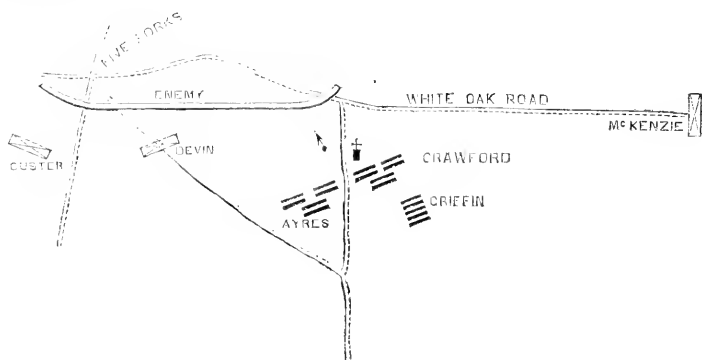
Gen. Ayres placed the Maryland Brigade on his left, in two lines, and Gen. Gwin's Brigade on his right; this last brigade was formed in three lines instead of two, as the regiments could not be so well disposed in two lines. Gen. Winthrop's Brigade, Gen. Ayres formed as his reserve. Gen. Crawford formed his line so as to place Col. Kellogg's Brigade on his left, Gen. Baxter's Brigade on his right, and Gen. Coulter's Brigade as his reserve.

The length of the front we occupied was about a thousand yards. The casualties of the three preceding days, together with those who had given out from weariness, or were absent on detached duty, had probably reduced our effective force at least a thousand men in each division below that with which we set out on the 28th, so that we had then present about twelve thousand men.

While the troops were forming, I prepared the accompanying sketch, with explanations, for each division commander, and directed them, as far as time would admit, to explain it to the brigade commanders:

" April 1, 3 p. m.

" The following is the movement now about to be executed:



" The line will move forward as formed till it reaches the White Oak Road, when it will swing round to the left, per-

“ perpendicular to the White Oak Road. Gen. Merritt’s and  
“ Gen. Custer’s Cavalry will charge the enemy’s line as soon  
“ as the infantry get engaged. The cavalry is on the left of  
“ the infantry, except McKenzie’s, which is moving up the  
“ White Oak Road from the right.”

Gen. Griffin, in his report, says the formation prior to the attack was as follows:

“ The First Division on the right flank formed in three  
“ lines, with one brigade on the right en echelon.”

I supplied Gen. Griffin with the same sketch and plan of operations as I had Gen. Ayres and Gen. Crawford, in which I thought I indicated Gen. Griffin’s position in rear of the right. But the necessity for him to protect his own flank, and the wedge-like shape of the formation, as a whole, led Gen. Griffin to regard his division as on the right.

Gen. Sheridan says, in his report, that he directed “ one  
“ division to be formed in reserve opposite the centre.” This is a mistake, his order was to form it in rear of the right. The line was to be formed “ obliquely to and at a point a short distance from the White Oak Road,” this threw the right in the advance, and it was supposed by him, would strike the enemy first and need the support.

During the formation of my troops, I used all the exertions possible to hasten their arrival, and everything was so prepared for them, that they marched at once to their assigned position without a halt.

Gen. Sheridan expressed to me the apprehension that the cavalry, which continued to fire on the enemy, would use up all their ammunition before my troops would be ready. I informed him that they would not all be in position before 4 p. m., but that I was ready to move at once with whatever was at hand, if he directed, and let the rest follow; but he did not. His impatience was no greater, apparently, than I felt myself, and which I strove to repress and prevent any exhibition of, as it would but tend to impair confidence in the proposed operations. When everything possible is being done, it is important to have the men think it is all that success requires, if their confidence is to be retained.

Against Gen. Sheridan's most ungenerous statement, that I gave him the impression that I wanted the sun to go down, I simply place my denial, and trust that my whole conduct in life, and especially in this war, sustains me in it. The sun did not set until two hours and a half after the formation was completed.

In proof of the efforts I made to get the troops in position, and the rapidity with which they did move, I present the following communications from Brevet Brig.-Gen. Bankhead, of my staff; Brevet Maj.-Gen. Crawford, commanding Third Division; Brevet Maj.-Gen. Griffin, commanding First Division; Brevet Maj.-Gen. Ayres, Second Division.

Gen. Bankhead writes me, under date of June 27 :

" *Sir* : In reply to your letter of the 17th inst., received  
 " the 25th, I have the honor to state that I was with you  
 " April 1st, at the time you received some instructions from  
 " Gen. Sheridan, through one of his staff officers. As to the  
 " nature of the orders I am not aware, further than that you  
 " immediately turned to me, and directed me 'to bring up  
 " 'the corps at once along the road we were at the time, and  
 " 'that you would meet the column yourself; that the divi-  
 " 'sions would march in the following order, viz., Third,  
 " 'First, Second.' I immediately galloped back, and gave the  
 " orders, in person, to Generals Griffin and Crawford. As I was  
 " directed to see the head of the column was started on the  
 " right road, I sent the order to Gen. Ayres, commanding  
 " Second Division (who was further off to the right), by one  
 " of your Aids, either Major Cope or Capt. Wadsworth.

" The orders were obeyed promptly, and the troops moved  
 " out as expeditiously as the nature of the road and the crowded  
 " state it was in (being blocked up with lead cavalry horses)  
 " would admit. Every exertion appeared to be made by Gen.  
 " Crawford, who had the advance, to keep the road clear for  
 " the infantry to pass. I remained with the head of the column  
 " until within a short distance of the place it was halted and  
 " placed in position to make the attack.

" (Signed) H. C. BANKHEAD,

" *Brevet Col., Ass't Insp. Gen.*"

The following is from Gen. Crawford, dated July 17:

" *General*: In reply to your communication of June 17, asking if my division did not move, with all practicable dispatch, in forming prior to our attack on the enemy at the battle of Five Forks, I have the honor to state, that the troops under my command moved at once, upon the receipt of the order, and that, in my opinion, no unnecessary time was lost from that time till they were formed as you directed.

" (Signed) S. W. CRAWFORD,  
" *Brevet Maj.-Gen.*"

The following is from Gen. Griffin, dated June 26:

" *General*: In reply to your communication of the 17th instant, in reference to the movement of the First Division just prior to the battle of Five Forks, April 1, 1865, I have to state I was in command of that division on that day, and about 2 o'clock p. m., received, through Col. Bankhead, Corps Inspector, an order to move down the road leading northward with all possible dispatch, as the cavalry and infantry were to attack the enemy at once. I moved my troops as promptly as I could, and on arriving near the place where the corps was formed for the attack, was met by yourself. You immediately pointed out the ground that my troops were to form on, remarking, in substance, that you wished me to be as expeditious as possible. The order was executed at once, and I then reported in person to you. In my opinion, the division was formed without any halting or unnecessary delay.

" (Signed) CHARLES GRIFFIN,  
" *Brevet Maj.-Gen.*"

The following is from Gen. Ayres, dated June 24:

" I have the honor to acknowledge the receipt of yours of the 17th inst., last evening, asking an official statement concerning the movement of the Fifth Corps on the 1st of April, from the position where it was massed to that where the lines of battle were formed previous to that attack. I do not

" know at what time the order was given to commence the  
" movement. I was ordered to follow the First Division. This  
" was done, and my division was kept well closed up on the  
" troops in front. On arriving near the position where the  
" lines were forming, you requested me to form my troops as  
" expeditiously as possible, as Gen. Sheridan desired to attack  
" the enemy immediately. Once again, during the formation,  
" you desired me to be expeditious. My division, being a very  
" small one, was soon formed, whereupon I reported to you  
" that I was ready. The order was then given, and the troops  
" moved at once to the attack.

" (Signed) R. B. AYRES,  
" *Brevet Maj.-Gen.*"

In view of this testimony, it is apparent that Gen. Sheridan had left out of his calculations the necessary time to make the formation he directed, and that, in his own opinion, his plan was endangered thereby.

The propriety of an army all moving at once pre-supposes, in order that the General who so employs it should be entitled to the credit of the results obtained, that he should have his information so exact that the mass falls directly upon a vulnerable and vital point of the enemy's position. If there should be a mistake in this, the chief merit belongs to those exertions and arrangements by which the mistake is corrected, or in the new dispositions which the occasion demands as requisite and which may be practicable. But Gen. Sheridan's calculation, as to the position of the left flank of the enemy's line, was faulty, and to a very serious extent, considering that he had placed all the troops in position for the move. The changes we had to make afterward required the greatest exertion of myself and staff, when everything was in motion, and in woods of the difficult nature usually found in Virginia, no one of the command being at all acquainted with the ground over which we were moving.

After the forward movement begun, a few minutes brought us to the White Oak Road, distant about a thousand yards. There we found the advance of Gen. McKenzie's Cavalry,



which, coming up the White Oak Road, had arrived there just before us. This showed us, for the first time, that we were too far to our right of the enemy's left flank. Gen. Ayres' right crossed the road in the open field, and his division commenced changing front at once, so as to bring his line on the right flank of the enemy's position. Fortunately for us, the enemy's left flank so rested in the woods that he could not fire at us as we crossed this open field, and the part of it that faced us formed a very short line. This Gen. Ayres attacked at once, the firing being heavy, but less than usually destructive, on account of the thick woods. The rapid change of front by Gen. Ayres caused his right flank, at first, to get in advance of Gen. Crawford's, owing to the greater distance the latter had to move, and exposed it to being taken in flank by the enemy. Orders were sent by me to Gen. Crawford to oblique his division to the left and close up this interval.

As soon as I had found the enemy's left flank, orders were sent to Gen. Griffin, by several staff officers, to move also obliquely to the left, and come in to the support of Gen. Ayres. But as Griffin's Division was moving out of sight in the woods, the order only reached him in the neighborhood of the place marked "Chimneys" on the map. While giving orders thus, I did not think it proper to leave my place in the open field, because it was one where my staff officers, sent to different parts of the command, could immediately find me on their return, and thus I could get information from all points at once, and utilize the many eyes of my staff and those of my commanders, instead of going to some special point myself, and neglect all others.

The time had not arrived, in my judgment, for me to do that. It may be that at this time it was that Gen. Sheridan thought I did not exert myself to inspire confidence in the troops that broke under a not very severe fire. There was no necessity for my personal presence for such purpose reported from any part of the field.

The time which elapsed before hearing from Gen. Crawford or Gen. Griffin convinced me they must have passed on beyond the right of Gen. Ayres. Leaving sufficient means

to send any important information after me, I then rode rapidly to the right, near the Chimneys, and was received with a considerable fire from the enemy across the open field. As I afterward learned, this fire occasioned some unsteadiness in Gen. Ayres' right, and also caused the left of Gen. Crawford to oblique to the right, so as to keep the protection of the ridge and trees. I remained here till Gen. Griffin arrived with his division, when I directed him to attack the enemy on the right of Gen. Ayres, and this he proceeded to do. I then rode back to Gen. Ayres' position, and found that he had captured the enemy's extreme right and some thousand prisoners. This information I sent to Gen. Griffin, and then rode as rapidly as possible to direct Gen. Crawford, as circumstances might require.

Before proceeding further, I will give quotations from Major Cope's report relating to the preceding.

" You sent me to Gen. Griffin with an order to bring his  
" division toward the White Oak Road, by the flank, in order  
" to be in better supporting distance of the second division.  
" Also to inform Gen. Crawford that he was going somewhat  
" too far to the right. I found Gens. Griffin and Crawford to  
" the right of the Chimneys, and gave them your orders. At  
" this time the enemy had a line of skirmishers running from  
" the left of their line of works, by the Sidney House, toward  
" Hatcher's Run. You came to where Gen. Griffin was, and  
" then returned to the White Oak Road, where I joined you a  
" few minutes after. The part of the enemy's line where you  
" were had been carried by Gen. Ayres, and you sent me  
" again to Gen. Griffin, with this information, and with an  
" order to push forward as fast as possible. He had already  
" reached the Sidney House, and was pushing forward across  
" the field. I delivered your order, and gave him the direc-  
" tion to advance, which was west."

I also annex an extract from Gen. Ayres' report, describing his operations after the forward movement began :

" After moving through a wood into an opening, the  
" skirmishers engaged those of the enemy, pushing them

“back. Soon after crossing the White Oak Road, finding  
 “the enemy’s fire to come from the left, I changed front to  
 “the left, by *facing* the second brigade to the left, and filing  
 “it to the left. Not to lose time, I also threw the first  
 “brigade” (his reserve) “into the front line on the left of  
 “the second. The third brigade, soon after engaging the  
 “enemy, finding its right flank in the air (I must confess  
 “that I experienced anxiety also on this account) portions  
 “of it were very unsteady, but subsequently moved up and  
 “bore their part of the action in a handsome manner. After  
 “this change of front, the troops were pushed forward and  
 “soon came upon the left flank of the enemy, which was  
 “thrown back at right angles with his main line, and covered  
 “by a strong breastwork, screened behind a dense undergrowth  
 “of pines, and about one hundred yards in length. This  
 “breastwork my troops charged, and took it at the bayonet’s  
 “point, capturing, in carrying it, over one thousand prisoners  
 “and several battle-flags. *Halting there a short time by Gen.*  
*Sheridan’s order, till it was apparent the enemy were giving*  
*away generally,* I pushed forward rapidly, holding my men  
 “in hand, and marching steadily in line of battle.”

I have italicised the “halting there,” &c., because it shows that Gen. Sheridan modified his own order not to halt. No order to halt was given by me. What caused the general giving way of the enemy while Gen. Ayres was halted by Gen. Sheridan’s order, was due to the operations elsewhere directed.

It will be seen that the rapid change of front by Gen. Ayres, necessitated by the unexpected condition of things, unavoidably threw his flank temporarily in the “air.” Had the line gradually swung round, by wheeling, Gen. Crawford would have been on his right, but as it was, the change had the momentary effect to leave Gen. Crawford “en echelon,” in rear of Ayres’ right. It happened, also, that the right of Gen. Ayres became exposed, too, to a fire from the enemy across the open field, around Sidney’s. Gen. Crawford’s left encountered this same fire, as it came up on Gen. Ayres’ right, and the effect was to cause Crawford’s line to oblique some-

while on the right, and in the cover of the woods and ridges, but it kept steadily moving on in the enemy's rear—a threatening movement which made the position of the enemy no longer tenable, as he was both in front and flank beset.

I will now extract from Gen. Crawford's report. After giving a copy of the order to attack that I had furnished him with, (see p. 32), he says:

"In obedience to this order we crossed Gravelly Run; crossed the White Oak Road and changed direction to the left, and advanced directly west. We encountered the enemy's skirmishers shortly after moving, driving them steadily back. Our way led through logs, tangled woods, and thickets of pine, interspersed with open spaces here and there. The connection between the Second Division and my line, could not be maintained. I received an order from both Gen. Sheridan and Gen. Warren, to press rapidly forward. I urged on the entire command. Gen. Coulter's Brigade, then, being in support of my rear, was brought to fill the gap between me and the Second Division. I pressed immediately on, and found myself in the enemy's rear on the Ford Road, which I crossed." \* \* "Just at this point the enemy opened on my center and left flank a very heavy fire. Maj.-Gen. Warren, arriving on the field at that moment, directed me to advance immediately down the Ford Road, and Gen. Coulter's Brigade was selected for that purpose. Two regiments, commanded by Major Funk, placed on what was then the left of the road, and the rest of the brigade were on the right, supported by the other two brigades en echelon. I advanced at once, and captured a battery of four guns and the battle-flag of the 32d Virginia Infantry. We then changed direction and advanced again in a southwest direction, the enemy dying before us, though keeping up a desultory firing."

Gen. Griffin's report says:

"Immediately after the order to advance against the enemy was given, with instructions to the division that after it had



Immediately after the forks were gained I directed Gen. Crawford to change front again to the right, and march toward the sound of the firing, so as again to take the enemy in flank and rear, and this he at once did. I also directed a cavalry brigade, which had been kept mounted, and which now came rapidly along the Ford Road toward me, not to move along it further, but to file to their left and proceed in the direction Gen. Crawford had taken.

I then passed down the Ford Road, and on reaching the forks, turned to the right along the White Oak Road. The troops were joyous and filled with enthusiasm at their success, but somewhat disorganized thereby and by their marching and fighting so long in the woods. On my arriving at the point E (see map), I found that our advance there was stayed by the enemy, who had formed a new line for their left flank near the position F, while they yet maintained their front against our cavalry on the south. Though the orders had been not to halt, and many officers were then urging their men forward, the disordered men not feeling the influence of their commanders, continued to fire without advancing.

Accompanied by Captain Benyaud and the portion of my staff then present, I rode out to the front and called those near me to follow. This was immediately responded to. Everywhere along the front the color-bearers and officers sprang out, and, without more firing, our men advanced, capturing all the enemy remaining.

During this last charge my horse was fatally shot within a few paces of the line where the enemy made his last stand, an orderly by my side was killed, and Col. Richardson, of the Seventh Wisconsin, who sprang between me and the enemy, was severely wounded.

I sent Gen. Bankhead, after the last of the enemy had been captured, to Gen. Sheridan, to report the result and receive his instructions. He returned with the reply that my instructions had been sent me. At 7 p. m. they reached me, and were as follows:

“Major-General Warren, commanding Fifth Army Corps,

"is relieved from duty, and will report at once for orders to Lieut.-Gen. Grant, commanding armies U. S."

I at once asked of Gen. Sheridan an explanation of this order, but could obtain none.

The Fifth Corps, in this battle, captured 3,244 men, with their arms, eleven regimental colors, and one four-gun battery with its caissons.

It lost, in killed and wounded, 634 men, of which 300 were in Gen. Crawford's division, 205 in Gen. Ayres' division, and 125 in Gen. Griffin's division. Among these were several distinguished officers of high promise. Their names will be duly recorded in the official reports.

### CONCLUSION.

I believe there never was a previous period of my military life when the operations I have described would not have gained me the praise of my superior. I have seen nearly all the principal officers of my command, and all unite in telling me that they regard my treatment as unjust. Gen. Griffin assured me he would so express himself at suitable opportunity to Gen. Sheridan. Of the many expressions of sympathy I have received from members of my corps, the following letter, sent me unsolicited, but published here by permission, written by one of its most worthy officers—Col. T. F. McCoy, of the One Hundred and Seventh Pennsylvania Volunteers—is given as a type:

"I had expected to have the pleasure of meeting you before retiring from the service, personally paying my respects, and bidding you a kind farewell; but it was ordered otherwise. A mere glimpse of you, as we passed through Petersburg on our march North, was the last sight the Fifth Corps had of their beloved commander. I can most truthfully assure you of your great popularity with the Corps, both officers and men; and I can assure you further, that it was a prevailing sentiment that it was a well-merited popularity. I speak freely and frankly. I can realize how gratifying it is to a commanding officer to know that he has the love and respect of his men.

“On the 2d of April, when it was known that you had been taken from us, there was mingled surprise, regret, and gloom. I have read and re-read, again and again, Gen. Sheridan’s report of the battle of the Five Forks, and, in my humble judgment, he utterly fails in justifying his conduct in your removal. Even if what is asserted were true, (which I do not believe), in view of your past valuable services to the country, and more especially to your Corps, and you in command, having, in a great measure, gained by its splendid conduct that afternoon, the most important victory of the campaign; and while thanks and shouts were going up to Heaven for the great achievement, to relieve from his honored command one of the principal heroes was an act most strange and no less astounding. This is merely the substance of what has been in my mind, and which I would have been pleased to have expressed to you personally, could I have met you at any proper period since. I look back upon this battle of the Five Forks with great interest, it being the turning point of the great movements from which flowed so many favorable and glorious results. Then, I have a more personal interest in it from the fact of my regiment conducting itself so well, that I had the honor of receiving the thanks of Gen. Baxter on the field.”

It is a source of much regret to me that the suddenness of my removal has prevented my taking an appropriate leave of my command, and thereby to express to them my warm wishes for their future, and my sympathy with them, whatever that future may be.

I feel, too, that many to whom it would have been gratifying to carry with them to their homes my testimony of their services have been deprived of it. So far as this can be remedied, I shall be glad to do so yet. I also hope that those who may have been overlooked in the distribution of honors will write to me, and I will endeavor to promote their just claims as far as my endorsement can.

No. 119 EAST SEVENTEENTH STREET,

New York City, December 10, 1865.



## APPENDIX.

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I give herein an appendix of all the authoritative communications yet published on the battle of Five Forks.

LETTER FROM GEN. WARREN IN REGARD TO HIS BEING RELIEVED  
BY GEN. SHERIDAN.

MISSISSIPPI RIVER, Thursday, May 11, 1865.

*To the Editors of the New York Times:*

I respectfully request the publication in your paper of this communication and accompanying letters relating to the battle of Five Forks.

The only reason I have heard assigned for relieving me at that time were the surmises of newspaper correspondents, which there is no authority for. But an unfriendly spirit toward me apparently dictated their suppositions, and they have done me much injustice. I was relieved only after the battle was over, and while at the head of my troops, and when not even a fugitive of the enemy was in sight.

I personally sought of Gen. Sheridan a reason for his order; but he would not, or could not, give one, and declined to do so. I obeyed the order to report to Gen. Grant that night, and was by him assigned to the command of the defenses at City Point and Bermuda Hundred. After the evacuation of Richmond and Petersburg, I was given the command of the troops at the latter place and along the Southside Railroad belonging to the Army of the Potomac. When these troops were relieved by troops from the Army of the James, I was left in Petersburg awaiting orders. I then addressed a letter (copy sent herewith), dated April 9th, to Gen. Rawlins, Chief of Staff, soliciting an investigation. On the 22d April, I sent another, requesting permission to publish the first one, for the reasons set forth therein (copy sent herewith). On the 2d May, I telegraphed Col. Bowers, Adjutant-General, to ascertain if these had been received, and he answered, they "were received, the latter during Gen. Grant's absence. Orders have been sent you (me) to report here, when you can see the General."

On May 3d, I received by telegraph an extract from General Orders No. 73, of May 1, assigning me to the command of the Department of the Mississippi. I at once proceeded to Washington, and after a personal

interview with Gen. Grant, received, on the 6th of May, an answer to my communications of the 19th and 22d April, authorizing my publishing them, and stating the reasons for not granting me the investigation sought. A copy of this letter is herewith sent.

Having thus exhausted my means of getting at the cause of my being relieved by Gen. Sheridan, I present the following brief account of the operations on the 1st of April:

The operations of the enemy on the 31st of March made it necessary for me to send a portion of my corps during the night to support Gen. Sheridan's cavalry, which had been forced back to near Dinwiddie Court-house. One of my divisions was thus compelled to march all night, after having fought all day, and the rest of the corps moved toward the enemy that confronted the cavalry at daybreak.

Our presence on the flank and rear of the enemy compelled him to fall back rapidly to the vicinity of the Five Forks, and Gen. Sheridan, on advancing with the cavalry, found him slightly intrenched there. This force proved to be a complete division of the enemy's infantry, and all the cavalry of Lee's army.

I received an order from Gen. Meade, after joining Gen. Sheridan, to report to him for duty, which I did, and the corps was halted by his direction at the point where we joined him, about 8 a. m. At 1 p. m. I was directed to bring up the corps to Gravelly Run Church, a distance of about two and three-fourths miles from where they had been halted, and there form with two divisions in front and one in reserve, so as to move with the whole corps, and attack and turn the enemy's left flank on the White Oak Road.

My line was formed accordingly. Ayres on the left, in three lines of battle; Crawford on the right, in three lines of battle; and Griffin's Division in reserve in masses. This occupied till 4 p. m. The forward movement then began. Gen. Ayres' Division became first engaged, wheeling to the left, from facing north to facing west as it advanced. Gen. Crawford's Division also wheeled to the left on Gen. Ayres' as a pivot, but owing to the nature of the ground and forests, and the greater distance to gain, he lost his connection with Gen. Ayres.

Into the interval thus left Gen. Griffin's Division was placed. These two divisions steadily drove in the enemy's left flank. Gen. Crawford's Division moved on westward till it gained the road leading north from the center of the enemy's position, when it was wheeled to the south, and attacked the troops that were endeavoring to hold this road as an outlet for escape.

All the divisions now closed in upon the enemy, capturing the artillery that was attempting to move north, and nearly all the infantry, which their movements had thrown in the greatest confusion. I successively followed the operations of my divisions from left to right, being with Gen. Crawford when the position was taken.

While these movements above described were going on, the cavalry engaged the enemy along his whole front, which was facing south. The enemy still maintained the right of his line, confronting the cavalry, after we had swept away his left and center; but the Fifth Corps crowding along the line without waiting to reform, captured all who remained as it swept along.

I was with the extreme advance in the last movement, and was relieved while there at 7 p. m., the battle being then over, and not even a fugitive enemy in sight.

The following are copies of the letters herein referred to.

Very respectfully, your obedient servant,

G. K. WARREN, *Maj.-Gen., Vols.*

GEN. WARREN TO COL. BOWERS.

PETERSBURG, April 22, 1865.

To Col. T. S. BOWERS, *A. G.*,

*Headquarters Armies of United States:*

*Colonel:* I beg leave forward a copy of communication addressed to Headquarters Armies United States, on the 9th instant, with the request to be allowed to publish the same. This will relieve me and my friends from an unpleasant relation to the public, will answer many letters daily received, and will prevent my silence being an injury to me. I can then patiently await the investigation that I do not doubt will in due time be accorded to me.

Very respectfully, your obedient servant,

G. K. WARREN, *Major-Gen., Vols.*

REQUEST FOR AN INVESTIGATION.

PETERSBURG, April 9, 1865.

To Brig.-Gen. J. A. RAWLINS, *Chief Staff,*

*Headquarters Armies of United States:*

*General:* The order of Gen. Sheridan taking from me the command of my corps on the evening of the 1st of April, after the victory was won, assigns no cause, and leaves me open to the inferences now finding expression in the public prints, and which are in every way to my prejudice.

I am unconscious of having done anything improper or unbecoming to my position, or the character of a soldier, or neglected any order or duty.

I therefore respectfully request a full investigation of the matter as soon as the exigencies of the service will admit.

I make this application now while awaiting orders, which I deem the most appropriate time; but I do not intend nor desire to press the matter

upon the consideration of the Lieutenant-General until he can give it his attention without interfering with more important duties. The regard already shown me, in immediately assigning to me another command on the 2d inst., gives me the assurance that he will not deem it an intrusion to solicit an opportunity to vindicate the honor and reputation of a faithful soldier of the Union, who waits in silence under an unmerited injury, till such time as his superior shall be ready to give him a hearing.

Very respectfully, your obedient servant,

G. K. WARREN, *Major-Gen. Vols.*

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GEN. GRANT'S REPLY.

HEADQUARTERS ARMIES OF THE UNITED STATES, }  
WASHINGTON, May 6, 1865. }

To *Major-General G. K. WARREN*:

*General*: Your note, requesting authority to publish your application for an investigation of the grounds upon which you were relieved from the command of the Fifth Army Corps, or to have the investigation, is received.

It is impossible at this time to give the court and witnesses necessary for the investigation, but I see nothing in your application objectionable to have published.

Very respectfully, your obedient servant,

U. S. GRANT, *Lieutenant-General.*

The following report, it will be perceived, contradicts no statement of my letter of May 11th:

REPORT OF MAJOR-GENERAL SHERIDAN.

CAVALRY HEADQUARTERS, May 16, 1865.

*General*: I have the honor to submit the following narrative of the operations of my command during the recent campaign in front of Petersburg and Richmond, terminating with the surrender of the rebel army of Northern Virginia, at Appomattox Court-house, Virginia, on April 9, 1865:

\* \* \* \* \*

During the night of the 31st of March, my headquarter were at Dinwiddie Court-house, and the Lieutenant-General notified me that the Fifth Corps would report to me, and should reach me about midnight. This corps had been offered me on the 30th instant; but very much desiring the Sixth Corps, which had been with me in the Shenandoah Valley, I asked for it, but on account of the delay which would occur in moving that corps from its position in the lines in front of Petersburg, it could not be sent to me. I respectfully submit herewith my brief accounts of the

operations of the day, the response to which was the ordering of the Fifth Corps to my support and my command, as also the dispatch from the Lieutenant-General notifying me of his action. I understood that the Fifth Corps, when ordered to report to me, was in position near S. Dabney's house, in the angle between the Boylston Road and the Five Forks Road.

Had Gen. Warren moved according to the expectations of the Lieutenant-General, there would appear to have been but little chance for the escape of the enemy's infantry in front of Dinwiddie Court-house. Ayres' Division moved down the Boylston Plank-road during the night, and in the morning moved west of R. Boiscan's house, striking the Five Forks Road about two and a half miles north of Dinwiddie Court-house. Gen. Warren, with Gritlin's and Crawford's Divisions, moved down the road by Crump's house, coming into the Five Forks Road near J. Boiscan's house between 7 and 8 o'clock on the morning of the 1st of April. Meantime, I moved my cavalry force at daylight against the enemy's lines in front, which gave way rapidly, moving off by the right flank and crossing Chamberlain's Creek. This hasty movement was accelerated by the discovery that two divisions of the Fifth Corps were in their rear and that one division was moving toward their left and rear.

The following were the instructions sent to Gen. Warren:

CAVALRY HEADQUARTERS, DINWIDDIE COURT-HOUSE, /  
April 1, 1865, 3 a. m. /

To Major-General WARREN,

*Commanding Fifth Army Corps:*

I am holding in front of Dinwiddie Court-house, on the road leading to Five Forks, for three-quarters of a mile, with General Custer's Division. The enemy are in his immediate front, lying so as to cover the road just this side of A. Adams' house, which leads out across Chamberlain's Bottom Run. I understand you have a division at J. Boiscan's; if so, you are in rear of the enemy's line, and almost on his flanks. I will hold on here. Possibly they may attack Custer at daylight; if so, attack instantly and in full force. Attack at daylight any how, and I will make an effort to get the road this side of Adams' house, and if I do, you can capture the whole of them. Any force moving down the road I am holding, or on the White Oak Road, will be in the enemy's rear, and, in all probability, get any force that may escape you by a flank attack. Do not fear my leaving here. If the enemy remains, I shall fight at daylight.

P. H. SHERIDAN, *Major-General.*

As they fell back, the enemy were rapidly followed by General Merritt's two divisions, General Devin on the right and General Custer on the left, General Crook in the rear. During the remainder of the day General Crook's Division held the extreme left and rear, and was not seriously engaged.

I then determined that I would drive the enemy, with the cavalry, to the Five Forks, press them inside of their works, and make a feint to turn their right flank; and, meanwhile, quietly move up the Fifth Corps, with a view to attacking their left flank, crush the whole force, if possible, and drive westward those who might escape, thus isolating them from their army at Petersburg. Happily, this conception was successfully executed. About this time, General McKenzie's Division of Cavalry, from the Army of the James, reported to me, and consisted of about 1,000 effective men. I directed General Warren to hold fast at J. Boisseau's house, refresh his men, and be ready to move to the front when required; and General McKenzie was ordered to rest in front of Dinwiddie Court-house until further orders.

Meantime, General Merritt's command continued to press the enemy, and, by impetuous charges, drove them from two lines of temporary works; General Custer guiding his advance on the widow Gilliam's house, and General Devin on the main Five Forks Road. The courage displayed by the cavalry officers and men was superb, and about 2 o'clock the enemy was behind his works on the White Oak Road, and his skirmish line drawn in. I then ordered up the Fifth Corps on the main road, and sent Brevet Major Gillespie, of the Engineers, to turn the head of the column off on the Gravelly Church Road, and put the corps in position on this road, obliquely to and at a point but a short distance from the White Oak road, and about one mile from the Five Forks. Two divisions of the corps were to form the front line, and one division was to be held in reserve, in columns of regiments, opposite the centre.

I then directed General Merritt to demonstrate as though he was attempting to turn the enemy's right flank, and notified that the Fifth Corps would strike the enemy's left flank, and ordered that the cavalry should assault the enemy's works as soon as the Fifth Corps became engaged, and that would be determined by the volleys of musketry. I then rode over to where the Fifth Corps was going into position, and found them coming up very slowly. I was exceedingly anxious to attack at once, for the sun was getting low, and we had to fight or go back. It was no place to intrench, and it would have been shameful to have gone back with no results to compensate for the loss of the brave men who had fallen during the day. In this connection, I will say that General Warren did not exert himself to get up his corps as rapidly as he might have done; and his manner gave me the impression that he wished the sun to go down before dispositions for the attack could be completed. As soon as the corps was in position, I ordered an advance in the following formation: Ayres' Division on the left, in double lines; Crawford's Division on the right, in double lines; and Griffin's Division in reserve, behind Crawford; and the White Oak Road was reached without opposition.

While General Warren was getting into position, I learned that the

left of the Second Corps of the Army of the Potomac, on my right, had been swung around from the direction of its line of battle until it fronted on the Boynton Road, and parallel to it, which offered an opportunity to the enemy to march down the White Oak Road and attack me in right and rear. General McKenzie was therefore sent up the Camp Road, with directions to gain the White Oak Road, if possible; but to attack at all hazards any enemy found, and, if successful, then march down the road and join me. General McKenzie executed this with courage and skill, attacking a force of the enemy on the White Oak Road, and driving it toward Petersburg. He then countermarched, and joined me on the White Oak Road just as the Fifth Corps advanced to the attack, and I directed him to swing round with the right of the infantry and gain possession of the Ford Road at the crossing of Hatcher's Run. The Fifth Corps, on reaching the White Oak Road, made a left wheel, and burst on the enemy's left flank and rear like a tornado, and pushed rapidly on, orders having been given that, if the enemy was routed, there should be no halt to reform broken lines. As stated before, the firing of the Fifth Corps was the signal to Gen. Merritt to assault, which was promptly responded to, and the works of the enemy were soon carried at several points by our brave cavalymen. The enemy were driven from their strong line of works and completely routed, the Fifth Corps doubling up their left flank in confusion, and the cavalry of Gen. Merritt dashing on to the White Oak Road, capturing their artillery and turning it upon them; and riding into their broken ranks so demoralized them that they made no serious stand after their line was carried, but took to flight in disorder. Between 5,000 and 6,000 prisoners fell into our hands, and the fugitives were driven westward, and were pursued until long after dark by Merritt's and McKenzie's cavalry for a distance of six miles.

During this attack I again became dissatisfied with General Warren. During the engagement portions of his line gave way, when not exposed to a heavy fire, and simply for want of confidence on the part of the troops, which General Warren did not exert himself to inspire. I therefore relieved him from the command of the Fifth Corps, authority for this action having been sent to me before the battle, unsolicited. When the pursuit was given up, I directed General Griffin, who had been ordered to assume command of the Fifth Corps, to collect his troops at once, march two divisions back to Gravelly Church, and put them into position at right angles to the White Oak Road, facing toward Petersburg, while Bartlett's Division, Griffin's old, covered the Ford Road to Hatcher's Run. General Merritt's cavalry went into camp on the widow Gilliam's plantation, and General McKenzie took position on the Ford Road at the crossing of Hatcher's Run. I cannot speak too highly of the conduct of the troops in this battle, and of the gallantry of their commanding officers, who appeared to realize that the success of the campaign and fate of Lee's

army depended upon it. They merit the thanks of the country and reward of the Government. To Generals Griffin, Ayres, Bartlett, and Crawford, of the Fifth Corps, and to Generals Merritt, Custer, Devin, and McKenzie, of the cavalry, great credit is due; and to their subordinate commanders they will undoubtedly award the praise which is due to them for the hearty co-operation, bravery, and ability which were everywhere displayed.

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I am, Sir, very respectfully, your obedient servant,

P. H. SHERIDAN, *Major-General*.

*Brevet Major-General* JOHN A. RAWLINS,

*Chief of Staff.*

CAVALRY HEADQUARTERS, DINWIDDIE C. H.,

March 31, 1865.

*Lieutenant-General* GRANT,

*Commanding Armies United States:*

The enemy's cavalry attacked me about 10 o'clock to-day, on the road coming in from the west, and a little north of Dinwiddie C. H. This attack was very handsomely repulsed by Gen. Smith's Brigade of Crook's Division, and the enemy was driven across Chamberlain Creek. Shortly afterward, the enemy's infantry attacked on the same Creek in heavy force, and drove in Gen. Davies' Brigade, and, advancing rapidly, gained the forks of the road at J. Boiseau's. This forced Devin, who was in advance, and Davies, to cross to the Boydton Road. Gen. Gregg's Brigade and Gen. Gibbs', who had been toward Dinwiddie, then attacked the enemy in the rear very handsomely. This stopped the march toward the left of our infantry, and finally caused them to turn toward Dinwiddie and attack us in heavy force. The enemy then again attacked at Chamberlain's Creek, and forced Smith's position. At this time Caphart and Pennington's brigades of Custer's Division came up, and a very handsome fight occurred.

The enemy have gained some ground, but we still hold in front of Dinwiddie C. H., and Davies and Devin are coming down the Boydton Road to join us.

The opposing force was Pickett's Division, Wise's Independent Brigade of Infantry, and Fitzhugh Lee's, Rosser's, and W. H. Lee's Cavalry commands.

The men behaved splendidly. Our loss in killed and wounded will probably number four hundred and fifty men; very few were lost as prisoners.



We have of the enemy a number of prisoners. This force is too strong for us. I will hold out to Dinwiddie C. H. until I am compelled to leave.

Our fighting to-day was all dismounted.

P. H. SHERIDAN, *Major-General*.

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DABNEY MILLS, March 31, 1865, 10.05 p. m.

*Major-General SHERIDAN:*

The Fifth Corps has been ordered to your support. Two divisions will go by J. Boiseau's, and one down the Boydton Road. In addition to this, I have sent McKenzie's Cavalry, which will reach you by the Vaughan Road.

All these forces, except the cavalry, should reach you by 12 to-night.

You will assume command of the whole force sent to operate with you, and use it, to the best of your ability, to destroy the force which your command has fought so gallantly to-day.

U. S. GRANT, *Lieutenant-General*.



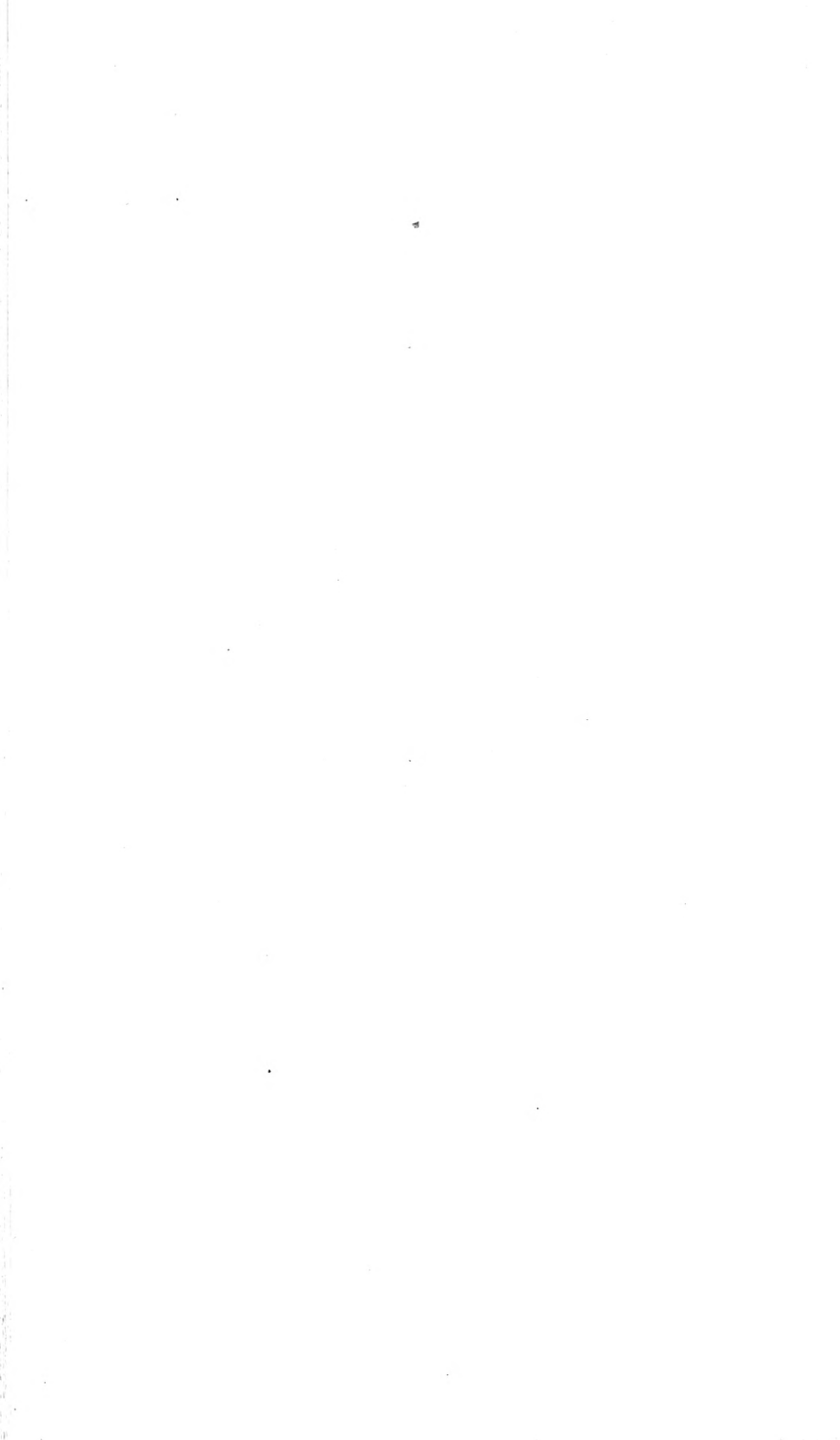








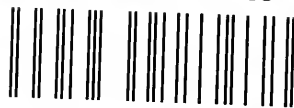








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